

Immanuel Kant

Deontology

“Groundwork of the
Metaphysics of Morals”

■ WHAT THE HELL?!?!?

Bio



- Born in East Prussia (1724-1804)
- Lived all his life in hometown of Königsberg.
- Hume awoke him from his “dogmatic slumber”
- A “Late Bloomer”?

Interesting Quote:

- “For many who have never heard of philosophy, let alone of Kant, morality is roughly what Kant said it was” -- Alasdair MacIntyre.
- “Doing your duty for duty’s sake”
(Note: duty; moral law; morality)

Kant's Overarching Question

- Is there a *supreme principle of morality* (if so, what is it)?
- Kant's project (on the whole) can be taken to be about searching for and deriving this fundamental moral principle.

Kant vs. Aristotle

- The purpose of reason is to make us good, **not** happy (Kant). The purpose of reason is to make us good, **and** ultimately to make us happy i.e. flourish (Aristotle).
- The most supreme good that we can have is a good will (Kant). The most supreme good is happiness (Aristotle).

Kant vs. Aristotle

- Aristotle tells us what it is to be a good *human being* (and what it is to live a good life as a *human being*).
- Kant seeks to show how the fundamental principle of morality obligates all rational beings (not just humans).

The main project

- Kant starts with various observations about “common moral cognition” (common sense morality). He then,
- Derives various formulations of the Categorical Imperative (CI). He then,
- Tests the plausibility of CI via its relation to commonly held duties

Common sense morality

- Without qualification, the best thing we could possess is a good will.

Not,

- Talents
- Temperaments
- Happiness

Common sense morality

- So, what is a good will?

Shopkeeper

An illustration of what it is to have a good will.

- The Shopkeeper example:
the shopkeeper undergoes three types of actions, only one of which is truly good/right.

Shopkeeper

1. He acts contrary to duty.
2. He acts in conformity with duty. What is this? (self-interest, benevolent inclination)
3. He acts from duty. What is this?

Shopkeeper

- (3) is about one who acted contrary to inclination to do wrong.
- Seems like (for Kant) acts also have moral worth when done in the absence of inclination

Conclusion from 'shopkeeper'

- So, the truly right act is the one that is not only required by morality, but is done solely because of the fact that it is so required.

Questioning 'shopkeeper'

- Why think that acting from sympathetic feelings (inclinations) is not of moral worth?
--cases where acting from inclination is better?
- Acting from inclination and the counterfactual-account of moral worth.

The counter-factual account

- An act done from inclination still has moral worth just so long as the person doing the act **would have** done the act from duty had she not had the inclination.

The Categorical Imperative (CI)

- Kant says the first formulation of the CI is supposed to follow logically from the information from the Shopkeeper example (I.e. from our intuitions about the good will).

CI and Shopkeeper

Well, what's supposed to be true given the Shopkeeper example?

1). Rational creatures recognize that some acts are right and that some are wrong.

CI and ShopKeeper

2). Rational creatures recognize a **moral law** (i.e. **set of rules; categorical imperatives**) that obligates them.

“X is shopkeeper’s duty” means “he and **any** other person in his position is **required** to X”.

CI and Shopkeeper

3. Right acts are in accordance with this moral law.
4. Right acts are **only** or at least **ultimately** done out of reverence (respect) for the moral law
5. Consequences of an act do not give it its moral worth.

CI and Shopkeeper

So, given 1-5, the fundamental moral principle will (**at the very least**) say something like:

- “Only do those acts that are required by the moral law”.

Filling out CI

- Q: Ok, but how do I know if my acts are required by the moral law?
- A: The action is required by the moral law just in case it is required by some rule (categorical imp) that is universal and binding on all rational creatures, including yourself.

Filling out CI

- Q: Uhhh, how do I know if the act is required by such a rule? I.e. how do I know if there is such a rule that would either require my action?

Filling out CI

- A: assume you do the act, what rule (general policy, **maxim**) would you say that you would be following in doing that act? Take that rule and see if it can apply to all rational creatures as such. Could every rational creature have respect for your rule such that you and them could w/out **problem** or **contradiction** follow it?

Filling out C1

- A: if (and only if) every rational creature can consistently act on your rule in the aforementioned way, your rule is a part of the moral law and the act in question is required by the moral law.

Two examples

- **Your specific action:** steal from the cash register at work.

Your general rule (maxim): take what is not yours.

- **Your specific action:** recycle your receipts.

- **Your general rule (maxim):** do that which will help the environment

First Formulation of CI

All this to say that,

- **act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.**

This is the first formulation of the Categorical Imperative (which is the fundamental moral principle).

The Bottom Line for Kant:

- What makes an action right for Kant?
(I.e. what explains why actions are right-
or of true moral worth)?

The Bottom Line for Kant:

- the fact that it is in accordance with the moral law

And,

- It is done with the proper motivation

The Bottom Line for Kant:

- An act is in accordance with the moral law just in case its maxim can be consistently and coherently acted on by rational creatures, including yourself.

The Bottom Line for Kant:

- Making a false promise to your friend, for example, is not in accordance with the moral law.

Why?

- Maxim (make and break promises when to your advantage) cannot be universalized.

The Bottom Line for Kant:

- Imagine a world where everyone made and broke promises.
- Is it even possible for you to make and break a promise in this world? NO.

Why?

The Bottom Line for Kant

- No trust
- No action in response to promise (e.g. lending money, counting on you)
- So, not even in a position to break it

Counter-examples?

- Maxim: lie in order to gain advantage to (only) those who are too ignorant to discover your ploy.
- Maxim: Show indifference to the poor when you are exorbitantly rich.

First Formulation of CI

Kant tests the first formulation by connecting it with commonly held duties:

- False promises
- Indifference
- Suicide

Second Formulation of CI

- **“So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means”**

The Second Formulation

- What does it mean?
- What's the rationale behind it?

Second Formulation

Interpreting the meaning of the second formulation:

For Kant, what is “Humanity”?

- What it's not...
- It is, roughly, synonymous with rationality.

Second Formulation/"Humanity"

For Kant, Humanity is,

- A capacity that distinguishes us from lower animals (c.f. Aristotle)

More specifically, Humanity is our...,

Second Formulation/"End"

Interpreting the meaning of the second formulation cont....:

For Kant, to treat something as an end is to:

- Not damage or hinder it
- Develop it (promote, cultivate, etc.)

Second Formulation/“End”

Humanity is seen as an ‘end’ that should be treated as such:

- What are some actions that either destroy or develop Humanity?

Second Formulation

But why think Humanity is something to be treated as an end (“in itself”)?

- Humanity’s vital connection to the good will.
--No goodwill without Humanity
- Herein lies a possible rationale for the second formulation.